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FIRST INTER-AGENCY MEETING ON THE PREPARATORY PROCESS FOR THE THIRD UNITED NATIONS CONFERENCE ON THE LEAST DEVELOPED COUNTRIES

Geneva, 20 July 1999

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INTRODUCTION

1. The First Inter-Agency Meeting on the Preparatory Process for the Third United Nations Conference on the LDCs was convened in Geneva on 20 July 1999 in accordance with General Assembly resolution 53/182. The Meeting marked the official launch of the preparatory process for the Conference.

2. The Meeting was addressed by Mr. Patrizio Civili, Secretary, Administrative Committee on Coordination (ACC). Mr Rubens Ricupero, Secretary-General of UNCTAD and Secretary-General of the Conference and Mrs. Anna Tibaijuka, Special Coordinator for LDCs and Executive Secretary of the Conference on LDCs.

3. Mr. Civili recalled the mandate for the Conference and for inter-agency consultations as contained in General Assembly resolutions 52/187 and 53/182. He reiterated the important role played by inter-agency consultations in the preparatory process for the First and Second Conferences. He emphasized the need for an effective system of agency focal points for the preparatory process and the need to link that process with forthcoming global events.

4. Mr. Ricupero said that the inter-agency consultation mechanism had been established to ensure the full mobilization and coordination of all relevant organizations and bodies of the United Nations system for the purpose of preparations for and follow-up to the Conference. Inter-agency cooperation is an essential element for the success of the Conference. He recalled the statement made by the United Nations Secretary-General to the LDC Ministerial Meeting in October 1998, to the effect that the Conference should be an inclusive one that would serve as a rallying point for Governments, the United Nations, other international organizations, civil society and the private sector, with the singular purpose of fashioning a new development agenda for the LDCs. It must be a Conference that rests on serious preparatory work and draws heavily on national experiences of LDCs. The Conference is a UN-wide Conference and covers a range of issues in addition to trade. It is a global Conference addressing the development problems of LDCs. He stressed the need, right from the beginning, to ensure the full involvement of all relevant actors in their respective areas of competence and comparative advantage, thus giving an opportunity for a wide spectrum of actors to claim ownership of the preparatory process and the final outcome and to commit themselves to carrying out their respective responsibilities arising from the Conference.

5. The substantive agenda of the Conference is broad, since the Conference is about the overall sustainable socioeconomic development of LDCs. However, to make progress, there is a need to identify critical areas and to set priorities. It would be futile to attempt to solve all the problems at once. It is therefore important for agencies to help in identifying the right priorities.

6. Mr. Ricupero reminded the Meeting not to overlook the fact that one of the major reasons why the previous programmes of action had had only limited success was because they were not accompanied by specific resource commitments. Thus, the securing of resources from donors for

the implementation of the new comprehensive programme of action to be agreed at the next LDC Conference was the major challenge facing everyone. New approaches for mobilizing development finance needed to be found.

7. Mrs. Anna Tibaijuka briefed the Meeting on the preparatory process for the Conference and presented the note prepared by the UNCTAD secretariat on the preparatory process (document UNCLDC/III/1). She raised several issues relating to resource requirements to undertake the envisaged activities in the preparatory process at the country and global levels, the country-level preparations, links with forthcoming United Nations events and activities, the frequency and scope of inter-agency consultations, the need for the designation of focal points in agencies for preparations for the Conference and the nature of the involvement of civil society in the preparatory process. She briefed the Meeting on the outcome of her recent consultations with the European Union, host of the Conference. The venue of the Conference is Brussels and the tentative dates are between April and June 2001.

I. Discussions/comments

8. In the ensuing discussions, representatives of agencies commented on the issues raised by the Secretary-General and by the Executive Secretary of the Conference as well as those contained in the secretariat note. They generally agreed with the proposal to have a bottom-up approach to the preparatory process, involving a comprehensive set of activities at the country level. The need to create partnerships and involve all actors was emphasized. Several comments were made on the proposal to convene thematic and country round-table meetings during the Conference. In particular, participants in the meeting commented on the relationship between these events to be convened during the Conference and the traditional country round table and consultative group meetings. The experience of the High-level Meeting on LDCs convened by WTO in 1997 was considered as a relevant precedent in this regard. Participants also stressed the need for appropriate sequencing of preparatory activities.

9. Several substantive areas not included in the note were proposed for consideration. These, include market access, institutional reforms, integration into the multilateral trading system, peace culture, mitigation of natural disasters and water resources. While recognizing the importance of all the above issues and others which have a bearing on the development of LDCs, the Executive Secretary of the Conference reminded the Meeting of the remark by the Secretary-General that efficiency and effectiveness would lie in investing effort and resources in solving the most critical development bottlenecks first. She also mentioned that the least developed countries themselves and their development partners will have a major role in setting the substantive agenda for the Conference. A two-day Consultative Forum meeting, comprising LDCs, development partners, several United Nations agencies and civil society, is being convened essentially for this purpose. The outcome of the Consultative Forum will be conveyed to the participants in the Inter-Agency Meetings.

10. To ensure an effective preparatory process at the country level, the Meeting emphasized the important role of the United Nations Resident Coordinators and field representatives of the World Bank, IMF, FAO, UNFPA, WMO, European Union and others. It was important to brief those country-level representatives on the preparatory process and to involve them fully at an early stage.

11. The representative of UNDP, recalling that most of UNDP's resources are allocated to low-income countries and LDCs, reiterated the agency's total commitment to ensuring the success of the preparatory process for the Conference, its readiness to cooperate with the World Bank and the European Union and its willingness to support country-level preparations financially.

12. The representative of the World Bank reiterated the Bank's support of the preparatory process. He sought further clarifications on the nature of that process at the country-level as it relates to the setting up of the agenda, and the nature and scope of the extraordinary round table meetings and thematic round table meetings and their relationships to the World Bank consultative group meetings and UNDP round table meetings.

13. Representatives of other agencies also conveyed the support of their respective agencies for the preparatory process for the Conference.

II. Follow-up action

14. It was tentatively agreed to convene the Second Inter-Agency Meeting in October 1999, in either Geneva or New York, depending on circumstances. The Executive Secretary will inform participants in due time as to the date and venue.

15. Agencies were requested as quickly as possible to designate focal points who will continue to participate in the preparatory activities leading to the Conference.

16. The Executive Secretary of the Conference will consult with agencies with field representation on the modalities of briefing their field representatives on the preparatory process and their envisaged role in it.

17. The Executive Secretary of the Conference, in cooperation with agency focal points, will ensure the link between the preparatory activities and forthcoming major global events.